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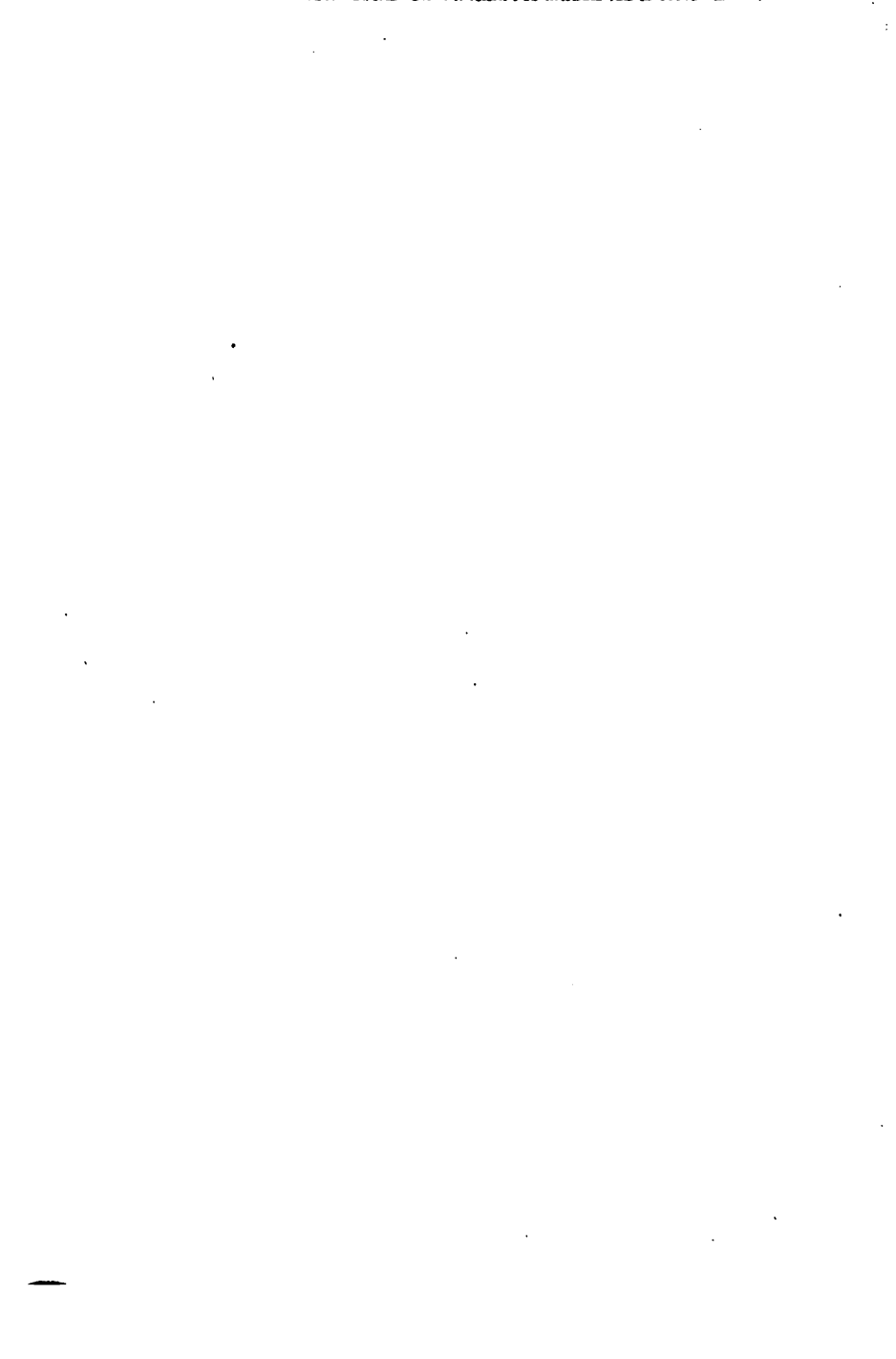


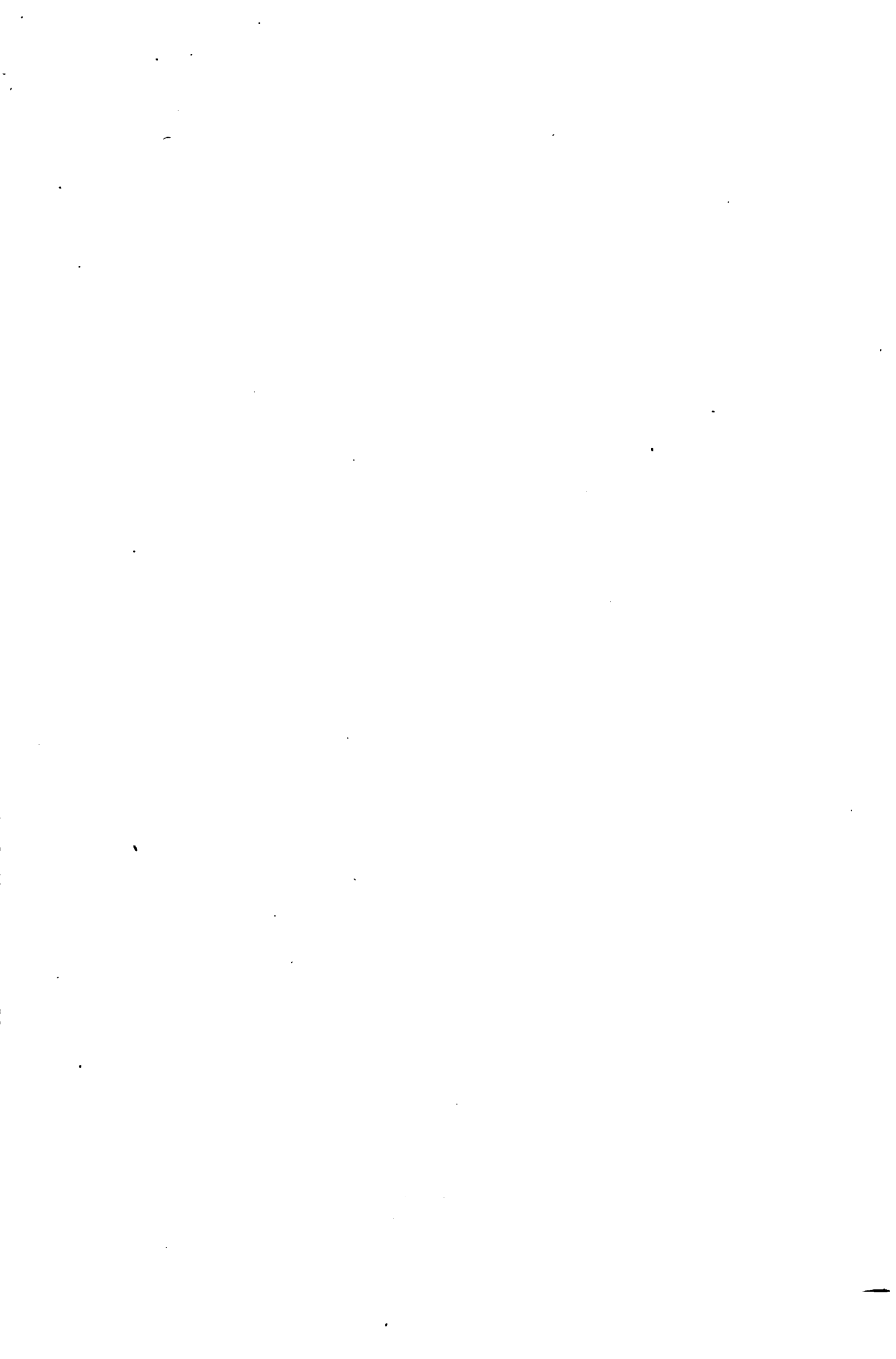
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BITS OF BACKGROUND

IN ONE ACT PLAYS

BY
EMMA BEATRICE BRUNNER



NEW YORK

ALFRED A. KNOPF

MCMXIX

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OVER AGE

CHARACTERS

MRS. ANNERSLEY, an actress

WILL ANNERSLEY, her son

MRS. BEASELEY, a friend

LÉONTINE, the maid

MRS. SARAH MULQUEEN

PLACE

New York City.

TIME

Autumn of 1917 when Government regulations did not permit women relatives of men in service to engage in overseas work and passports were refused to applicants over forty years of age.

OVER AGE

THE scene is the living room in the home of an actress, a famous one, so the room is well furnished with taste and charm. It is essentially a becoming background although just now, a rather sombre one. At least WILL ANNERSLEY thinks so. He enters, pulls up the shades, letting in the sunshine; sits on the couch, disarranging the pillows; drags out the newspapers which were neatly piled on the table; in short upsets everything. He is probably privileged because he is delicate and the only son of a highly emotional, adoring mother.

Suddenly LÉONTINE, MRS. ANNERSLEY's maid, comes bustling in. In the glare of the light she looks her fifty years, though her hair is still black, her eyes dark and snapping. At sight of the room she is much perturbed and therefore overbold.

LÉONTINE

Ah, Monsieur, it is too bad! This room — the look of it! I implore you adjust those curtains. You know that madame your mother could never

stand this glare. She is coming in now; this minute! I beg of you!

(While LÉONTINE is bustling around trying to put everything in order at once, MRS. ANNERSLEY enters.)

LÉONTINE

Monsieur! Ah, Madame!

(LÉONTINE is torn between the very charming woman who has appeared in the doorway, and her son who has risen to receive her. The woman is fifty, but even in the glare there is nothing to betray it, except her son. She is in a luxurious tea gown that harmonizes with the apartment. LÉONTINE has now arranged the couch. MRS. ANNERSLEY recognizes her background and flits into it. She raises a newspaper to her eyes.)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Shrinking in the glare)

Billy boy — Billy!

ANNERSLEY

Oh, forgive me, Mater.

(He pulls down the blinds, and her face becomes radiant with smiles.)

I'm worried about my job!

OVER AGE

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MRS. ANNERSLEY

Don't let anything worry you; I never do.

ANNERSLEY

(Importantly)

You're not working for the Department of Justice; I am.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

No, thank heaven!

ANNERSLEY

I've been there this morning, talking to them and to some of the Secret Service people. There's such a lot to be done! What with spies and German intrigues they have their hands full. And I've done nothing, nothing!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Plaintively)

But, Billy boy, what can you do?

ANNERSLEY

(Moodily)

I don't know! That's it. Nothing ever comes my way! They were telling me this morning about a woman whom they strongly suspect is one of a gang of bomb makers, a spy in the service of the enemy! They say she hangs about the thea-

tres a good deal. You haven't happened to see, or hear anything about anyone by the name of Mulqueen? That's the name she goes by now.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

No. Anything new in the papers this morning?

ANNERSLEY

Nothing special. They've arrested a German, masquerading as a Belgian. I knew they were going to yesterday. He's been using German-American firms as dummies to get wool for Germany. Then —

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Irritably)

Oh, I didn't mean that sort of news! We seem to talk of nothing but spies in this house!

(Annersley jumps to his feet nervously, conscious of wrong doing.)

LÉONTINE

(Quickly with infinite comprehension)

Madame was superb last night! A packed house again!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Willing to admit both counts)

Yes — yes.

LÉONTINE

There was more applause than ever!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(With a sigh of satisfaction)

Yes, I believe there was.

LÉONTINE

And again the house it was sold out!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Do you wonder I feel half dead this morning?

ANNERSLEY

(Anxious to make amends)

But you look great!

(The faithful LÉONTINE seeing now that all is well, disappears about her work.)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(All smiles)

Oh, Billy boy, you're a dear! What should I do without you? How I suffered the day you went up for examination! If they had accepted you! Ah, the poor mothers and wives! My heart bleeds for them! *(Now almost in tears.)* Billy boy, if they were to take you — I'd kill myself.

OVER AGE

ANNERSLEY

Oh, no, you wouldn't.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

No; no; perhaps not! I should live! My face would show my suffering; my breaking heart, my tortured soul would be reflected there.

(MRS. ANNERSLEY *acts her suffering to the full and is only interrupted by the entrance of MRS. BEASELEY.*)

MRS. BEASELEY

Léontine said I could come in.

(The interruption comes from their neighbor and intimate friend. She is a splendid specimen of womanhood, big, fine, fifty. A few grey hairs, a few lines, but healthy and strong, full of exuberance and energy.)

I stopped just for a moment to ask if I might bring you over some eggs from the farm — but what's the matter?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Oh, we poor mothers and wives!

MRS. BEASELEY

(In consternation)

My dear!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Those who have sons in France. If my son were there!

MRS. BEASELEY

But he isn't.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

But if he were there! If he were strong enough! My dear when one has an imagination one suffers. (*Her tone indicates that her neighbor has none.*) Tell me, what news have you? Anything more?

MRS. BEASELEY

(*Simply*)

My boy is not dead, or I should have heard.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

How do you stand it?

MRS. BEASELEY

By keeping busy; by helping other boys.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

If you could only go over to nurse, or something —

MRS. BEASELEY

Impossible, no mothers are allowed. And then my age; they want young women. If I only looked thirty-five!

OVER AGE

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Complacently)

Yes, you do look older.

ANNERSLEY

(Breaking in)

There's a lot to be done here!

MRS. BEASELEY

Yes, yes, looking after our boys.

ANNERSLEY

And looking after the spies!

(Enter LÉONTINE with card)

LÉONTINE

For madame!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

For me? Why, Léontine, you know I'm not at home! Who is it? *(Reading card.)* "Dear Lady: I hope you will receive me, pardon the liberty. I need advice that you above all others can give me. Yours in heartfelt admiration. Sarah Mulqueen." I never heard of her!

ANNERSLEY

(In great excitement)

Read that again!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Why, what's the matter? Billy! What is it?

ANNERSLEY

Let me see that card! (*He reads it eagerly.*)
Sarah Mulqueen! Mother, that's the name I just
told you! Sarah Mulqueen is a spy, a famous
spy! The Secret Service has been after her for
weeks! You must see her! It's the most won-
derful coincidence! Léontine, where is she?

LÉONTINE

In the reception room.

ANNERSLEY

Go back to her! Don't let her out of your
sight! Tell her Madame will see her in a minute!
Keep her. Mrs. Beaseley, help me!

(*LÉONTINE nods reassuringly and exits.*)

MRS. BEASELEY

It seems worth while, Julia!

ANNERSLEY

She doesn't dream she's going to walk into a
trap!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Julia Annnersley traps a spy!

(*Visualizing headlines in the morning
papers and yielding graciously.*)

ANNERSLEY

(Briskly)

Now we must be prepared for everything, anything; she's probably a coarse, bold creature, who will offend you every time she speaks. They told me she had several aliases and any number of disguises. One man said she was young and blonde; another swore she had dark hair! She's here for a purpose, of course. We must be on our guard; none of us must tell her anything, and yet we musn't seem to suspect. There's something she wants to find out, of course, or she wouldn't have asked for the interview! And, mother — she may want to see you alone.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Interrupting nervously)

What?

ANNERSLEY

But I'll be within call if she does. See, I'll watch from here!

(Indicates a curtained door leading to another room.)

MRS. BEASELEY

I'll go as soon as I've seen her!

ANNERSLEY

And none of us must forget that she has said she'll never be taken alive!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Seeing herself in a new rôle)

You mean she carries a pistol?

ANNERSLEY

Possibly. But so do I! Now, mother, are you ready?

(He raises the shade again.)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Protesting)

Billy boy!

ANNERSLEY

(Impatiently)

Mater, remember she's a spy, a dangerous character! We must be able to see her!

MRS. BEASELEY

Shall I ask Léontine to bring her in?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

One moment! Here move the couch forward!

ANNERSLEY

(Placing chair in light)

This is her chair, mother. Now be careful!
Now Mrs. Beaseley!

(MRS. BEASELEY exits.)

OVER AGE

ANNERSLEY

(Quickly)

And one thing more, mother; don't let her leave under any circumstances! No matter what happens you must keep her! Let her have whatever she wants. Anything, anything! Don't fail me!

(In the slight pause that follows, they arrange themselves for the proper reception of MRS. MULQUEEN. Then MRS. BEASELEY returns followed by LÉONTINE.)

LÉONTINE

(Announcing)

Madame Mulqueen!

(A small pathetic, insignificant, elderly person carrying a black bag comes timidly in at the door, a figure in dingy grey. Skin, hair, eyes, all look as if tinted with the same dull hue. Altogether Mrs. Mulqueen in manner and appearance is a surprise to everyone.)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Recovering first, after an awkward pause)

Are you Mrs. Mulqueen? (MRS. MULQUEEN nods timidly.) This is my friend, Mrs. Beaseley, a great worker for the Red Cross, and my son, Mr. Annersley. Won't you be seated?

ANNERSLEY

Here; here, sit here.

(MRS. MULQUEEN *has moved awkwardly to an arm-chair, but ANNERSLEY actually insists upon the chair in the light. She moves it out of the light. He pushes it back. Finally she sits on the extreme edge of it.*)

MRS. MULQUEEN

(*Uncomfortably*)

I wasn't expecting to see anyone. I thought you'd be alone. I—I—

(*She hesitates, and pauses. They all exchange significant glances.*)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

You didn't mention that your business concerned me alone.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(*Awkwardly*)

Oh, didn't I? I'm sorry. I don't express myself well. I never could, not even at school. That's my trouble. I mean one trouble. There now, I've blurted it out! Have I hurt anyone's feelings? I hope not; I wouldn't do that for the world.

OVER AGE

ANNERSLEY

(Quickly, with a glance at his mother)

Oh, we were going anyway. I've got a lot of things to do!

MRS. BEASELEY

I was going too. I'll bring you over the eggs before I start for the hospital.

(ANNERSLEY crosses to his mother, and lays his hand on her shoulder, reassuringly.)

MRS. MULQUEEN

(To MRS. BEASELEY)

You're in a hospital?

MRS. BEASELEY

Yes, helping, helping all I can for my son. He's over there — *(ANNERSLEY makes a sign for her to tell nothing, and she ends lamely)* somewhere in Europe.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Quivering suddenly)

Your son — over there?

MRS. BEASELEY

Yes — Why, what's the matter?

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Apparently confused)

Nothing. I was just thinking — you've a son!
That's all.

MRS. BEASELEY

That seems to surprise you.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Hesitating)

No — no — I — *(Stupidly)* Lots of women
have sons!

MRS. BEASELEY

(Proudly)

Mine's a Colonel in the 38th Infantry.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Shrilly, as though losing control of her voice)
The 38th!

MRS. BEASELEY

You know someone in the 38th?

MRS. MULQUEEN

Yes — that is — well — I didn't say I knew
anyone, did I? I didn't mean to. I — no — no.
You see I express myself badly. I told you I did.
I'm not used to people.

OVER AGE

MRS. BEASELEY

(Bitterly)

Oh, well, I can see you haven't anyone very near to you over there!

MRS. MULQUEEN

Can you? To be sure! Of course you can.

(Through all this, WILL ANNERSLEY has been getting more and more irritable. Things don't seem to be progressing his way at all. This MRS. MULQUEEN is a most curious person. One minute she seems to be on the verge of tears; the next her voice is shrill with excitement. But he has had experience enough to know that any sort of person may be a spy. He is anxious to get to work.)

ANNERSLEY

(Abruptly, even sharply)

I must be off. Are you coming, Mrs. Beaseley?

MRS. BEASELEY

Yes; yes, to be sure. I'll be back again with the eggs.

(The two women are left alone. There is a long pause. SARAH MULQUEEN never moves her eyes from the actress. At last MRS. ANNERSLEY rises nervously.)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Well, what is it? You wrote you wanted to see me. Well?

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Looking around timidly)

It's — it's — I'll come to it in a moment. Oh, you're so wonderful! (MRS. ANNERSLEY, *undeniably pleased, sits down again. Another pause.*) And that was your son that went out of the room a moment ago?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Wonderingly)

Yes.

MRS. MULQUEEN

I heard you had a son, about twenty-five. That makes it all the more wonderful.

(MRS. MULQUEEN *stares at* MRS. ANNERSLEY, *stares and stares, in a way that is almost embarrassing.*)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(At last)

Makes what wonderful?

MRS. MULQUEEN

(With genuine admiration)

The way you look. Not more than thirty-five! Thirty even, at a pinch!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Thank you.

(Another pause, which threatens to be embarrassing.)

MRS. MULQUEEN

Now your friend, the lady that just went out — what's her name?

(Carelessly playing with a paper cutter lying on table.)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Suspiciously and eagerly, because she is glad to have something to be suspicious about.)

Why? Why do you want to know?

MRS. MULQUEEN

Why just so as to indicate her. What else should there be?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Still suspicious, nervously removes paper cutter)

Her name is Beaseley.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Reflectively)

She looks her age.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Puzzled, but not displeased)

Yes, she does.

MRS. MULQUEEN

So does the woman who let me in.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

My maid, Léontine.

MRS. MULQUEEN

And I. Three old women! And you young among us!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Her most gracious self)

What do you mean?

MRS. MULQUEEN

I shouldn't be surprised if you look all the younger because we look so old. It makes a heap of difference.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

But you haven't asked to see me about that?

MRS. MULQUEEN

No; no. *(Looks around timidly.)* I'm coming to it. Even here in this room close to, you're wonderful. Oh, I've seen you in all your plays. Every night I've been to see you, and I

wasn't sure if you'd look young off the stage. So I sent in my card, asking you to see me.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

It was most unusual.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Awkwardly)

Would you mind changing seats with me?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Alarmed)

What for?

MRS. MULQUEEN

Oh, just — I want to see how you look in the sunlight. You don't mind?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Indeed I do mind!

MRS. MULQUEEN

Ah, that's a point!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Bluntly and no longer afraid. No one could be afraid of this woman)

Are you here taking points? For what?

MRS. MULQUEEN

I want to be young. You're always young; young when you're sad; young when you're gay;

young; young! I look so old, so much older.
Yet, you won't mind if I say it? (*In a whisper.*)
I'm not.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

How do you know?

MRS. MULQUEEN

Well, your son.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(*Very patronizing*)

Yes, but you see I was only sixteen when he
was born, and he's just past twenty. So —

MRS. MULQUEEN

(*Interrupting eagerly*)

That's what I want to say! I'm dying to say
just that; but I can't!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(*With genuine amazement*)

You!

MRS. MULQUEEN

I can't, because people wouldn't believe me;
because I can't look it. Any woman who can look
it, can say it. And nowadays there are so many.
Oh, help me! Help me!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Help you?

OVER AGE

MRS. MULQUEEN

Help me to be able to say it, to look it.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

That's most extraordinary. You! You want to be —

MRS. MULQUEEN

. (*Eagerly interrupting*)

Young! Young!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

But —

MRS. MULQUEEN

(*Pleading earnestly*)

If you can, why can't I?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Well, you are the most astonishing person I ever met!

MRS. MULQUEEN

Will you help me?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

I?

MRS. MULQUEEN

That's what I came for. Now it's out. And you'll think I'm a fool, but I'm not. I'm only a woman — a woman —

(*Breaking off feebly.*)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Oh, my dear madam, it's not every woman who can throw off a dozen years at will. It's a talent like any other.

MRS. MULQUEEN

But perhaps I have the talent; perhaps I'm like the man who didn't know he could play the violin till he tried. I've never tried, because no one cared. You see I just let myself go, for years and years. I lived for my husband. I didn't mention before I had a husband. He was one of the kind that never noticed how I looked, what I had on. It didn't make any difference to him so long as the stew was right, not too thick, and the potatoes crisp. Once, or twice, on our wedding day for instance, I dressed up. I bought a fichu, a lace fichu. I've got it here in this bag. I put it on, hoping he'd notice it and like it. I felt just like a girl. "Where did you get that?" he asked. "At Simpson's," said I. Simpson's is the little store near us. "What for?" says he. "What did you get it for?" Well, it just seemed as though I didn't know what I did get it for. So I said nothing, and that night I laid it away with some other things I had when I was young. But even after that, sometimes in my room alone, I've had a feeling — (*Glances timidly about her.*) as though I wanted to be young. One night I

looked so pale and wan that I even tried with some roses, red roses I had on a bonnet. You know, the kind the colour comes off of. I rubbed them on my cheeks, and I looked like myself twenty years ago. I felt as though I could do most anything that I did then, sing or dance. I took some time that night doing up my hair, made it looser, fluffed it out. Of course I rubbed off the colour before I went out to dinner, but some of it must have stayed. "Been putting up jams?" said James; his name was James. "You look all het up." I guess I was born with ambitions, for I was often miserable, used to cry when I was alone because I amounted to so little!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Uneasy and somewhat moved)

That's where you made a mistake.

MRS. MULQUEEN

To cry? Yes, I know. Hurts the eyes and fades them out.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

To cry alone is always a mistake.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Apparently not understanding)

But I was so miserable.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

When I'm miserable, everyone knows it. My servants, Léontine, my son. I share my misery with the world. Hidden emotion is most wearing.

MRS. MULQUEEN

You share it? And I, I've waited all day crushing back my tears, stifling my sighs, going about with a breaking heart, and smiling lips; waiting for the dead of night, ashamed. For years I've been ashamed to show what I felt; ashamed to want to look pretty; afraid I'd seem conceited and foolish. You never feel foolish?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Certainly not. It's my business.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Resolutely)

And now it's my business! At last I don't feel foolish at all or vain. I have a reason for it all; a reason to be young; a reason greater than vanity, greater than —

(Breaks off abruptly as though realizing she has gone too far.)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Curiously)

This is very interesting. What is your reason? Who is it you want to please?

OVER AGE

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Confused)

Who? The world, everyone!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Some man?

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Jumping at the suggestion)

Yes, yes, I'm young here in my heart; just as young as ever I was, just as anxious to please.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

But my dear woman —

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Quickly interrupting)

I know you have wonderful black eyes, and lovely hair. Not a grey hair. But look at mine. *(She pulls off her hat to plead her cause.)* If it was combed smooth and glossed up, and dressed right. That's it! I'm taking points from you all the while. I've got to learn quickly, and then I'll come out somewhere. You'll see, you'll see. I've never had the chance. I've lived in my kitchen while the world was going on, never dreaming what youth meant, and looks, and the real business of a woman.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

How old is he? The man you love?

MRS. MULQUEEN

The man I love! How old should you guess?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Well, he must be elderly; sixty or so, I should say.

MRS. MULQUEEN

He's beautiful! Young, blonde, fearless — twenty-five.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Twenty-five? You! If you can have a lover of twenty-five you're young.

MRS. MULQUEEN

But he — he — (*Abruptly breaking off.*) No, that's my secret.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Ah, he doesn't love you! And you're trying to get him back?

MRS. MULQUEEN

(*Insisting upon comparing herself with the beautiful* JULIA ANNERSLEY)

You still please men, don't you?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

But I always did!

MRS. MULQUEEN

So did I once. See, that's the way I was, once. (*Digs down into her bag and brings out a photograph.*) My dress was pink. I never had but one pink dress, and it had a fichu of lace like the one I got at Simpson's. I've got it here. It gives me a long line like yours, the fichu does; and I had little slippers with high heels. Oh, I can remember how tall I felt in them! And now my dress is dull and grey, and my shoes are broad and low, and I'm sloppy and old.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

And in love with a boy twenty-five!

(*The actress folds her arms and looks at SARAH MULQUEEN as from a height.*)

MRS. MULQUEEN

Don't move! I'm learning! I'm learning! When I fold my arms I do it this way — (*Stooping and slopping over.*) But you, you fold them high, like Napoleon. I've seen pictures of him.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

He was short. So am I!

MRS. MULQUEEN

And your high heels! My shoes are disgraceful. I've really got pretty feet. Then your walk! Oh, I know how you glide. And your back is young, your shoulders straight.

(Suddenly MRS. MULQUEEN picks up her bag.)

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Alarmed and remembering that she was to keep the spy at any cost)

What are you going to do?

MRS. MULQUEEN

I've had my lesson. I wish you could see what it's done for me. I wish I could make myself pretty for you. I've some things in my bag! If I only could —

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Completely roused)

Wait a minute — I'll call my maid. You mustn't go! Léontine! (LÉONTINE *appears.*) Léontine is very clever; she'll take you to my room; she'll dress your hair! Your feet are no larger than mine. She'll give you a pair of my slippers. She'll show you how to add a little colour to your cheeks! She's very clever. Go with her. Go; go! Léontine, make Madame beau-

tiful, do your best. Then let me see how you look. Please; please!

(MRS. ANNERSLEY *actually pushes her out with LÉONTINE and then sinks exhausted into a chair.*)

(ANNERSLEY *comes in cautiously.*)

ANNERSLEY

(*In an excited whisper*)

Well? Well? What do you think?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

You heard what she said?

ANNERSLEY

(*Nervously and beginning to wonder if he's on the right track after all*)

She's clever, eh?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

She wants to be beautiful for some man!

ANNERSLEY

(*Scornfully*)

Some man! Don't you believe it.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

She's a most interesting study; I never saw any one quite like her. If one were to put her on the stage, no one would believe —

ANNERSLEY

(Breaking in, always with an eye on the door through which SARAH MULQUEEN disappeared, and in a low voice)

She's notorious!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

It seems incredible! I'm sure you're wrong.

ANNERSLEY

Nonsense! I know all about her! She's a dreadful person!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Well, then, she's wonderful!

ANNERSLEY

(Knowingly)

Precisely! That's what they all say. Don't let her fool you!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

But this woman is so timid, so faded. I can't make it out!

ANNERSLEY

(With great superiority)

I know! That's nothing. It's some sort of make-up. She's clever, wonderfully clever. I grant you that. But you were superb! We'll have the gratitude of the whole nation tomorrow!

OVER AGE

MRS. ANNERSLEY

What are you going to do?

ANNERSLEY

Do? Hand her over! What do you suppose?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Still unconvinced)

A spy with that make-up! Incredible! You heard her say she was going over to the other side?

ANNERSLEY

Yes — when?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

I don't know.

ANNERSLEY

She mustn't leave this house, Mater, till I'm ready; no matter what we sacrifice. I'll bet she's planning to blow up a transport this minute.

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Hush, she's coming!

ANNERSLEY

Remember they said she'd never be taken alive!

(MRS. MULQUEEN enters, transformed. LÉONTINE has covered her hair with one of MRS. ANNERSLEY's wigs. She has on the fichu from her bag. Her cheeks are

rouged, her slippers are high-heeled. Her walk and her manner are quite different. She has thrown off twenty years.)

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Showing pleasure almost like a child, turns to ANNERSLEY)

You don't know me! Do you now?

ANNERSLEY

Well, you're wonderful! No one would know you! I swear they wouldn't.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(With satisfaction)

Yes. I'm the old lady that went out of here! Am I young? Do I look natural? See my hair! How old do I look?

ANNERSLEY

(Slowly with cleverness)

Let me see! My mother tells me some man —

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Following him eagerly)

Yes —

ANNERSLEY

How old is he?

OVER AGE

MRS. MULQUEEN

Young; your age; twenty-five!

ANNERSLEY

Where is he?

MRS. MULQUEEN

Over there — somewhere. I'll tell you something, a secret; he's wounded and I'm going over to him. I can do my bit as well as the youngest. You believe me now when I look like this; now that I am no longer wrinkled and withered. I'm young, young. I haven't an ache or a pain. I'm going to him. I can do anything now, that youth and strength can do; anything, now that someone isn't telling me I'm old and useless.

ANNERSLEY

Have you got your passport?

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Proudly)

Yes; see! Sarah Mulqueen!

(She hands him her passport.)

ANNERSLEY

By Jove! *(ANNERSLEY takes the passport, examines it carefully; grabs magnifying glass from table, shrugs and grunts out at a venture.)* It's forged!

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Shrilly)

Forged! Not genuine?

ANNERSLEY

No.

MRS. MULQUEEN

But I've paid for it!

ANNERSLEY

You? What?

MRS. MULQUEEN

(More and more excited)

You mean I can't go over on it! You mean —
What do you mean?

ANNERSLEY

(Looking at her threateningly)

I mean that Sarah Mulqueen is an enemy alien!
The Department of Justice has been hunting her
for weeks.

MRS. MULQUEEN

(As though appalled)

An enemy — Sarah Mulqueen? Boy, do you
know what you're saying?

OVER AGE

ANNERSLEY

(More and more menacing)

Yes. She and her gang have laid plans to blow up our boats in the harbour. We've been trailing her for weeks. I don't mind telling you now we had almost given up hope when you —

(The entrance of MRS. BEASELEY in great excitement interrupts; so excited is she that she takes even the transformed old lady for granted.)

MRS. BEASELEY

News! Wonderful news! The wounded of the 38th Infantry are coming home.

(Suddenly MRS. MULQUEEN appears to be on the verge of collapse; ANNERSLEY never takes his eyes off her.)

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Gasping)

The 38th!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Joyfully)

Your boy!

MRS. BEASELEY

(In ecstasy)

Yes, my Albert!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Oh, my dear friend!

ANNERSLEY

(To Mrs. Mulqueen who is now strangely excited)

What is it?

MRS. MULQUEEN

(Between tears and smiles)

The 38th! The 38th! That's my boy's regiment. He's wounded; he's coming home; my boy! Uncle Sam has played fair; he's given me back my boy!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

Your boy!

ANNERSLEY

Who are you?

MRS. MULQUEEN

(With quivering lips)

I'm the mother of a soldier in the 38th — the mother of a wounded boy —

ANNERSLEY

(Resentfully)

You're not Sarah Mulqueen?

MRS. MULQUEEN

Bless you no! I'm the mother of a boy like you; only he's wounded. There was no place at his bedside for an old lady who happened to be his mother. I was trying to cheat to get over to him, to be with him, to nurse him. My husband was Colonel Andrews. My boy is Charlie Andrews. I came on to New York from Minneapolis a year ago. Oh, I wanted so to go over. Can you understand it? I didn't realize I was too old. I only knew I was a mother. My age came upon me all of a heap when they looked at me and turned me down. That was before they knew I had a son over there. "Knit, knit," they said, "Knit!" The old lady's job! But I didn't want to knit. I didn't want to sit at home and knit. Good Lord, that meant thinking! I told them I was willing to do anything. I'm vigorous if I am more than 35. I can work as well as the youngest, and I can suffer and be silent. They turned me down when I told them the truth; turned me down for silly girls in love with adventure; turned me down because I was a mother, a mother and fifty! And I made up my mind to cheat Uncle Sam, to go to my boy in spite of rules and regulations. I met Sarah Mulqueen. She's young and has no son to give. She sold me her passport, gave me her name in exchange for mine. Then I saw Mrs. Annersley, young and

yet my age; young with a son as old as mine. Do you see? And now Uncle Sam has played fair; he's bringing my boy home — (*To MRS. BEASELEY.*) Your boy and mine! (*Recovering and crossing over to mirror.*) I wonder if he'll know me this way! What do you say, boy?

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(*With conviction*)

She's telling the truth!

MRS. MULQUEEN

(*As if anyone could doubt it!*)

The truth?

ANNERSLEY

By thunder! I believe she is! I've made a fool of myself. What shall I do?

MRS. MULQUEEN

What is it? What's wrong?

ANNERSLEY

(*With sudden inspiration*)

Listen: If you can help hand Sarah Mulqueen over to the detectives, you'll be one of the greatest women of America!

MRS. MULQUEEN

(*Enjoying it hugely*)

I? Old Mrs. Andrews? Great?

OVER AGE

ANNERSLEY

(Eagerly)

Can you? Can you?

MRS. MULQUEEN

Can I? Why, she's waiting for me now. I'm to give her another hundred dollars for her passport. I'll take you to her!

ANNERSLEY

(Suddenly)

Good! I'll be with you in just a minute.
(Hurries out, closing the door after him.)

MRS. MULQUEEN

(With a sudden burst of patriotism)

Ah, there's work here for American women if they only knew it!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(Slowly relinquishing her own dream of advertisement)

Mrs. Andrews of Minneapolis traps a spy!

MRS. MULQUEEN

(With savage determination)

Leave her to me!

MRS. ANNERSLEY

(After a moment's consideration joyously discovering some balm in Gilead)

Trap set in the home of Julia Annersley!

(The three women smile happily, each in her own way, when in through the door bursts ANNERSLEY.)

ANNERSLEY

(Breathless with excitement)

It is! It is! She is Sarah Mulqueen! Lock the doors! *(He locks one while the women fly to the others.)* I've just been talking to headquarters! She and her pal were out together; they caught the pal but she escaped; slipped into this house; intending to appear in a new disguise from new quarters. Knew you lived here, Mater! It was all planned! Her pal has confessed.

MRS. MULQUEEN

Damn him! *(Recognizing that the game is up, she suddenly reveals herself with startling vulgarity.)* The dirty little hound! Well, I'll die game! And don't any of you forget how I fooled the great Julia Annersley! Some acting, eh? And I'd have got away with it too — if — if — God, how I hate all men!

(Snarling and struggling viciously in ANNERSLEY'S hands, as the curtain falls.)

THE SPARK OF LIFE

CHARACTERS

MRS. BARSTABLE

THE NURSE

DR. CARTWRIGHT

DR. WALKER

THE SPARK OF LIFE

THE curtain rises on an empty stage, disclosing a luxurious living room in a modern apartment house.

A single doorway opens into the hall, which apparently leads on the left to the front door, on the right to the dining room, and beyond to the bedroom.

The room is essentially cheerful. Everything in it suggests home and people of taste. There are books and magazines, and vases of flowers on the tables, harmonious draperies at the windows, comfortable chairs, an open piano. A small alcove hung with red curtains is on one side. The curtains are open so that a luxurious couch with cushions may be seen, a becoming background for the Mistress of the house.

Into this cosy scene a woman enters quickly. She is MRS. BARSTABLE. She is good looking, well groomed, pale and tense. One can see plainly that she is on the verge of collapse. She makes a tremendous effort and succeeds in recovering some of her self-control, as the NURSE enters.

NURSE

Mr. Barstable is asking for an extra pillow.

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Indicating the couch in the alcove)

You may take one of those silk ones. Oh, Nurse, when the doctors come out of Mr. Barstable's room, show them in here where they can be alone. I'll see them after the consultation.

NURSE

They're coming right out now.

(The NURSE exits. MRS. BARSTABLE moves to the table, takes a pistol from the drawer, and, listening all the time for the coming of the doctors, places it somewhere out of sight. There is a sound of voices outside. She quickly crosses to the red curtains and conceals herself behind them as DR. WALKER and DR. CARTWRIGHT enter.)

DR. WALKER

(In a low voice, with visible concern, as though continuing a conversation)

Nothing to be done, eh?

DR. CARTWRIGHT

Nothing.

DR. WALKER

And everything to be feared?

(DR. CARTWRIGHT *nods gravely.*)

DR. CARTWRIGHT

(*After a pause*)

Has he a family?

DR. WALKER

Just the wife, who adores him. They were such pals. I've known him all my life. I'm much more his friend than his doctor, you understand. Why we've lived in the same house for twenty years. I've the key to their front door: their home is mine. (DR. CARTWRIGHT *nods sympathetically.*) He never had a day's illness, never in all the years I've known him. Frightful! A man of his physique! Such an end! His poor wife! What shall I tell her! When she finds out that it's hopeless —

(*Breaks off uneasily.*)

DR. CARTWRIGHT

Oh, she won't; she needn't know for a time; not till —

(*Makes a hopeless gesture.*)

DR. WALKER

He had a horror of disease. I've heard him say he'd kill himself if ever he had warning.

DR. CARTWRIGHT

Oh, that was when he was sound and strong. You'll find an entirely different man; with a new philosophy. The hospitals are full of them: brave fellows — heroes, who'll play the game to the end.

DR. WALKER

If only those cursed Germans had killed him outright! Poor Jack, doomed to live God knows how long! Paralysed, maimed, helpless —

(Both men pull up sharply and look towards the curtains. MRS. BARSTABLE stands in front of them, ashen.)

DR. WALKER

(Uneasily)

Jack is — we were just — we must talk things over — see what's best to be done.

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Deadly calm)

I know — I heard.

(She sinks into a chair with a hopeless gesture.)

DR. CARTWRIGHT

(Uncomfortably)

Too bad.

DR. WALKER

(Almost irritably)

Really Ella, we should have told you in due time.

MRS. BARSTABLE

(With emphasis)

What it was good for me to know.

DR. WALKER

Well, well; after all we must have faith.

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Interrupting with despairing insistency)

The end is inevitable! And what an end!

DR. CARTWRIGHT

Oh, now — now — our wounded men are wonderful! Give your husband time; you'll see; time works wonders. Dr. Walker will do everything possible and I'll see you again in a few days.

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Suddenly springing to her feet)

Wait — wait just a minute! Wait! I have a proposition to make to you. *(She throws back her head and the colour rushes to her cheeks.)* Kill him!

(She says this calmly, without the slightest hint of hysteria.)

DR. CARTWRIGHT

(Gruffly)

Nonsense; nonsense; you shouldn't upset yourself in this way. Be brave, brave as our splendid boys.

DR. WALKER

You're overwrought, Ella! I don't wonder. I'm going to give you and Jack something to make you sleep; both of you need it.

DR. CARTWRIGHT

Yes, yes.

MRS. BARSTABLE

Eternally?

DR. WALKER

(Almost impatiently)

Oh, come — come!

DR. CARTWRIGHT

You'll find that your husband will gradually accommodate himself, believe me.

MRS. BARSTABLE

Never!

DR. CARTWRIGHT

I assure you; you'll see.

(Enter the NURSE with a box of flowers.)

NURSE

Mr. Barstable is asking for you, madam.

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Suddenly regaining control of herself)

I'll go up.

NURSE

These flowers just came.

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Quite calmly)

Arrange them for me, please,— here in one of these vases. *(Turning to doctors.)* Oh, I'm all right now; quite calm, quite myself again. I know it's your office hour, George. *(To DR. WALKER.)* Don't wait, but come back. You will, won't you?

(The NURSE exits with the vase, leaving the flowers on the table.)

DR. WALKER

Surely, at the first minute.

(MRS. BARSTABLE exits.)

DR. CARTWRIGHT

I must run on now. If you need me, let me know.

(Both men leave the room together talking; the front door is heard to shut, as the

NURSE *returns with a vase of water.* DR. WALKER *follows her into the room almost immediately.)*

DR. WALKER

Now, Nurse, Mrs. Barstable is naturally much overwrought. She must have something to make her sleep; I'll be back with some powders for her.

(DR. WALKER exits and the sound of the front door closing again is heard. The NURSE left alone hums as she arranges the flowers. She is still busy when MRS. BARSTABLE enters, locking the door behind her, swiftly and softly. She is completely calm, but in the few minutes she has been out of the room she seems to have aged years.)

NURSE

(Holding up the flowers in the vase)

Aren't they beautiful?

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Distractedly)

Yes — yes —

NURSE

Shall I take them up to Mr. Barstable?

MRS. BARSTABLE

Presently.

NURSE

Is he alone?

MRS. BARSTABLE

I think so.

(Through all this the NURSE keeps looking at MRS. BARSTABLE whose manner seems to her unusual, to say the least.)

NURSE

(Uneasily)

I'll go up. *(Crosses to the door and finds it locked.)* What does this mean! Why have you locked the door?

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Firmly)

To give my husband a chance.

NURSE

A chance at what?

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Dispassionately)

To get out of it! He's doomed. There's no hope. Sit down. *(The NURSE recoils horrified.)* There's no use, you know. There's nothing for you to do; you can't help it. You might as well be calm. I've promised him his chance, and he's going to have it.

NURSE

You mean — ? that you ?

MRS. BARSTABLE

Yes; precisely. (*The NURSE tries to reach the window. MRS. BARSTABLE picks up the pistol, which she has concealed for just this emergency, resolutely.*) Sit down. When I am ready you may leave this room; not before.

NURSE

My God! It's murder!

MRS. BARSTABLE

(*With conviction*)

If it is, it's righteous murder! You'd kill an animal if it were suffering. A human being asks for a chance and you won't give it to him — you with your medical ethics! It's his life; he has a right to do as he pleases with it.

(*The NURSE, by this time completely terror-stricken, falls into a chair.*)

NURSE

You're mad!

MRS. BARSTABLE

I never was more sane in my life, and neither was he.

NURSE

He's not; he's a sick man; you've no right; it's taking advantage of him.

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Beginning triumphantly, and ending in pitiable choking sobs)

I gave him my word, and I've kept it as he'd have kept his! When we were both well and strong in the midst of health and beauty — happy, young, free — we made a solemn compact. It was at Aix les Bains, at the Hotel de L'Europe. Oh, we had such pretty rooms there, full of sunshine, on the corner, with a balcony, and a view. Children were playing under our windows; colour, light, happiness everywhere. It had been raining; the air was full of the scent of flowers. Only to be alive was a joy! At the Casino they were playing the waltz from "Romeo and Juliet." Great Heaven, it's all as fresh as though it had happened yesterday! Suddenly over the graveled walk there came towards us in a wheel-chair a pitiful, doomed creature with acute senses and deformed limbs — the semblance of a man! Guarded lest he might get his chance to make a decent exit. We stood looking at him. My husband exclaimed: "Why do they keep him alive? Look at his eyes! He wants to go!" The man's eyes — they haunted him. "If he be-

longed to me, he'd have a chance to get out!" he said, "Poor wretch; condemned to die, to suffer without hope, while specialists consult, while friends pity and compare notes. May the Lord deliver me from such a fate! Promise me, Kate, that you'll give me my chance. It may be upon me before I suspect, and it's hard for a dying man to get enough of the right stuff." On that day we solemnly swore that if such a fate ever overtook one of us the other would provide the means to get out. Thank God I've had the courage to keep my word.

NURSE

(After a pause, gently)

But now — now — how do you know your husband doesn't want to live?

MRS. BARSTABLE

How do I know? My husband? Live like that? To become a thing? The thing they said he was bound to be?

NURSE

(Desperately)

What you're doing is a crime! It's murder!

MRS. BARSTABLE

It's a gentleman's death.

NURSE

(Under stress of great excitement)

You — you — What have you given him?
How did you get it?

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Almost with cunning)

Ever since I heard Jack was wounded I've been collecting it. A few drops here, a few drops there; for my suffering dog; for an aching tooth; for neuralgia; half a bottle in all!

NURSE

(Seeing a ray of hope)

It's an overdose! Thank God!

MRS. BARSTABLE

Oh, no; I know the dose! I poured it out and placed it within easy reach of his hand.

NURSE

(Still clutching at a straw)

Oh, then there's hope!

MRS. BARSTABLE

Hope of what?

NURSE

You didn't give it to him?

MRS. BARSTABLE

No, it wasn't necessary. I left it for him right at his hand.

NURSE

He may not take it.

MRS. BARSTABLE

Not take it? If ever a man knew what he wanted it was Jack Barstable!

NURSE

(Wildly)

Yes, before — before! But not now. Since he's been over there and seen —

MRS. BARSTABLE

He knew exactly what I meant when I leaned over him. I could see it in his eyes! I placed the bottle beside him, with a glass of water, in case he — *(Breaking off with a shudder.)* It's bitter stuff, I know.

NURSE

(In agony)

How could you?

MRS. BARSTABLE

(Now quivering and barely able to control herself)

His hand clasped mine for a minute. Then I

could stand it no longer! I fled — here — to you — so that he might be free — free —

NURSE

Let me go to him!

MRS. BARSTABLE

Not quite yet; I know my Jack; he must have time. One last look around our room — a few minutes to think — to pray. My picture is beside him on the little table, the one he likes best. He'll touch it softly. Then — he may not be able to overcome an involuntary shudder, brave as he is —

NURSE

Oh, how awful!

MRS. BARSTABLE

He'll have a spasm of pain, perhaps — some nausea. Then deadly cold and moist. Then unconsciousness — blessed unconsciousness.

NURSE

Let me go! Open the door!

MRS. BARSTABLE

My Jack — my Jack — It's done! It's done!
You may go to him now! Go — go — It's over —
(She throws the key at the NURSE who unlocks the door and dashes from the room.)

MRS. BARSTABLE *stands listening a moment. Then she takes from her dress a small phial and swallows the contents at one gulp. Her hand instinctively goes out to JACK's picture lying on the table; clasping it to her she gropes her way off to the curtained recess. The front door is heard to open as she disappears. And now the NURSE is seen rushing back through the hall.*)

NURSE

(Speaking outside in great excitement)

Oh, Doctor Walker! Thank God you've come! Such a scene! *(Then the voices grow confused, as she explains, still outside, what happened.)* Mrs. Barstable . . . yes, a compact . . . poison . . . she left the bottle . . . within reach of his hand . . . told me he was going to kill himself! Oh, I can't stay here any longer. It's awful! I've never had an accident. *(The NURSE begins to regain her equanimity as she appears at the door with DR. WALKER. They enter the room together.)* But he didn't—he didn't take it! Not a drop passed his lips! I'd never have forgiven myself if anything had happened!

DOCTOR

But nothing did happen, thank God!

NURSE

No, no; he actually joked with me; he says he's a famous patient; he wants to live.

DOCTOR

Bully for Jack! Bully!

NURSE

I don't think he had an idea of what was in the bottle! He's forgotten the compact and all the rest — but where is she? Mrs. Barstable?

DOCTOR

Why, isn't she with him?

NURSE

No, she was here! I thought you —

DOCTOR

No, I haven't seen her; I just came in.

NURSE

I left her here.

DOCTOR

Perhaps she — (*The NURSE gives a quick look outside and comes back shaking her head.*) Perhaps the maids — or — isn't she with him?

NURSE

I just came from there! No — no —

(A groan or sigh comes from behind the curtains. The DOCTOR dashes over and flings them open as MRS. BARSTABLE rolls off the couch to the floor. He kneels beside her; listens; looks up; shakes his head. She is dead.)

NURSE

And he — he is alive! He wants to live! He wants to see it through to the end!

CURTAIN.

STRANGERS

CHARACTERS

A WRITER

A CALLER

A WOMAN

STRANGERS

A *LUXURIOUS living room or den opening into a hall which leads to the front door. As the owner of it happens to be a successful writer it is equipped with a commodious writing desk and plenty of books, besides easy chairs, harmonious draperies and good looking rugs. A table set with sandwiches, bottles, glasses, etc., and an open fire add an air of expectancy to the scene.*

Indeed as the curtain rises two men are entering. One of them is the WRITER himself, a quiet, receptive person, as any author in search of material may be, careful of his own wares while graciously attentive to the display of those in other mental store-houses. The other is a CALLER, somewhat too rotund, perhaps, for distinction, but well dressed and completely at ease: a glib talker, not at all awed by the reticence of his companion. On the contrary.

CALLER

If I may, I'll come in just for a moment. I remember you said you were going to be busy.

STRANGERS

WRITER

Yes, presently, when I get at it.

(He pushes a chair invitingly forward.)

CALLER

(Looking around with interest, taking note of things)

So this is your home!

WRITER

(Crosses to desk and appears to be rearranging everything on it)

Well, it's a place where I can lose myself. Comfortable, with all the conveniences, and no one to bother me. My servant goes off early, I sleep while she works and vice versa. She leaves me a bite here, serves my breakfast at any old hour, disarranges things and disappears.

CALLER

(Still looking about)

The scene of your experiences?

WRITER

Yes, I never go around in search of material; I don't sit on park benches or ride about in subways and buses. What I write is from my inner consciousness. Though tonight I'll confess I'm at my wits' end. *(He crosses to table.)* A glass

of cognac, before you go! It may give me a new view point; I've felt all day as though I were looking at a blank wall. (*Both drink.*) In front of me a sheet of paper to be covered and nothing to cover it with. We get that way; sometimes it lasts hours, sometimes days.

CALLER

What I envy you is this solitude.

WRITER

But you, you're a married man? (*He breaks off with a question. The other nods.*) Home, and all that sort of thing! Children, perhaps?

CALLER

(*Who is now comfortably seated*)

Strange how we club acquaintances know nothing of one another. We meet daily, exhibit pictures that reveal nothing, tell stories, exchange views that are impersonal, drink together, eat together, and there it ends. Suddenly we pick up a paper and read a scandal, a death, a wedding, and the identity of our club friend is revealed. (*Pause.*) What a shock, poor Egbert Kelly, eh? (*Lighting a cigarette.*)

WRITER

He seemed a mild, pleasant fellow.

CALLER

He used to appear and disappear at the club like any of the rest of us, always gay, generous, companionable, and all the time this burden on his soul. Couldn't make both ends meet and none of us suspected. Strangers all of us, under one roof! (*Pause.*) You've no ties?

WRITER

No.

CALLER

Lucky man! And yet I only want to be untied to tie up again. You may think it's indelicate my speaking frankly like this to one who five minutes ago was practically a stranger, but I feel tonight as though you had suddenly been revealed to me. These rooms of yours have an atmosphere, they're human. You have tastes. Why I didn't know you were a writer till the other day. I mean I didn't know you were *the* Drayton. You see, honestly, I've never read you. My wife attends to that end of things. I've seen your books about on the tables, together with the magazines. I'm not much of a reader. She sits up half the night with a book in her hand. I often find her when I go home, late — early. Till now I've always gone home.

WRITER

It's got to that stage, has it?

CALLER

Yes, so far, and no distance at all. My wife is one of those domestic creatures, a woman of no imagination, content in the present; living from day to day, secure in her happiness; never dreaming — (*He pauses as though words were inadequate.*) If she sees me restless she says affairs down town have been going badly with me; or she speaks of indigestion, or late hours, or sleepless nights, or God knows what! Oh, I've heard her explain me over and over to the others of our set with imaginations as limited as hers.

WRITER

(Dryly)

It must be gratifying to know at least she's not suspicious.

CALLER

As to that I'm not sure. Sometimes I wish she understood. Her calmness, her security exasperate me. She knows me as little after all these years, knows as little of my life, of my desires and dreams as you do, you who until tonight have never seen me outside of the club.

WRITER

(Curiously)

Is it possible that you never betray yourself?

CALLER

Why, yes, I've thought I did; in fact there have been moments when I didn't care whether I did or not; even more, when I've wanted to, to have it over, to have her know me as I am. Imagine, I've come in at four, at five, in the morning. I've heard her voice saying, "Been to the club? Pleasant evening?" And when I've growled out, "Don't know, didn't go there," she's turned over and gone to sleep.

(Pause.)

WRITER

I don't want to make myself disagreeable, but perhaps she may have grown — er — become indifferent.

CALLER

Her feelings are as transparent as crystal. She darns my socks herself, keeps an eye on my clothes, orders for my meals the dishes she thinks I like on the chance I may come home, and all that sort of thing. No, my friend, she regards her position as impregnable. That's what I can't understand. She's perfectly satisfied. Not a hint

of the mine under her very feet, the mine that some day is sure to explode.

(Pause.)

WRITER

I take it, she's — I mean you have nothing really against her?

CALLER

Oh, Lord no; she's absolutely everything she should be. She hasn't even an extravagance. She's without courage, without temptations, without — well, I know where she is every hour; her life is an open page. If I were to go home now I'd find her in our perfectly commonplace sitting-room, dozing over a book. Forgive me for boring you with the same old story.

WRITER

It has a new turn, always.

CALLER

(Explosively)

The woman is an angel!

WRITER

(Rather amused)

Not your wife this time!

CALLER

Some day you may hear about me, Eberle; that

he, that I — well that Mrs. Eberle wants a divorce. At all events you won't say — "Eberle, the man I used to meet at the club!" At least I've revealed myself. I feel better. And you — well, I know where you live!

(Breaking off with a smile.)

WRITER

Oh, I! — I've no history. I'm given over to work. Perhaps some day, somewhere, out of heaven, perhaps — who knows?

CALLER

You're going to work all night?

WRITER

I hope so, if I can.

CALLER

I'm off. Thank you, and Good-night.

(The WRITER goes with him out into the hall; re-enters,—leaving the door half open. He disappears into an adjoining room, changes his coat and then returns to his desk. Suddenly in the doorway there appears a WOMAN. At the first glance, she is rather insignificant. One would pass her in the street for instance and not notice her in her dark clothes and small hat. She has thrown back her veil but none the

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less, even when she slips in and closes the door, she does it without a hint of bravado.)

WRITER

(Sharply)

What is it?

WOMAN

(Anxiously)

I — please don't be cross. Let me tell you —

WRITER

(Interrupting)

Yes, yes, what is it? How did you get in here?

WOMAN

I just slipped in out of the street as the door was opened. It's cold out.

(Shivering.)

WRITER

Why, yes, but you musn't; I'm busy. I can't be interrupted.

WOMAN

I won't interrupt. I'll be very quiet.

WRITER

No, that won't do. You must go. You've no right to come into people's houses. You know that.

— well I've seen you, and I've read you. So I know you a little.

WRITER

Ah, indeed!

WOMAN

Yes, that's one reason why I'm here tonight.

WRITER

I don't understand.

WOMAN

I thought you might help me.

WRITER

Then you're not — not —

WOMAN

A woman of the street? Of course not! You know better than that. That only happens in plays, or books. Arnold Bennett, Haddon Chambers — you — Pinero even! Of course it's not true.

WRITER

I don't see why it shouldn't be as true as this! You out of the night — here — now —

WOMAN

(Smiling sweetly)

Yes, I'm the heroine of a new plot. You might like it. Or are plots easy to find?

WRITER

No, they're damned difficult — I beg your pardon.

WOMAN

(Easily)

Oh, in the circumstances —

WRITER

(Suddenly conscious that he has remained seated)

Sit down, won't you?

WOMAN

You don't want me to go now?

WRITER

Why no! Not if you'll stay. I'd like to hear your story, now that you're here.

WOMAN

(Suddenly)

Do you mind if I open the window? What with the smoke and all that it's very close. *(Before he can answer she has opened it and is standing so that an electric light shines full upon her.)* Look!

(He comes up behind her.)

WRITER

What is it?

that time. Now he's not. He has settled down. Well, that was the beginning. He was married and I became — (*Slight pause.*) the other woman. That didn't last very long. I mean my anomalous position.

WRITER

(*Quickly*)

You met someone else?

WOMAN

Not at all.

WRITER

You grew tired of each other?

WOMAN

No, on the contrary we kept on together.

WRITER

In your anomalous position?

WOMAN

No, his wife died. I took her place.

WRITER

He married you?

WOMAN

Yes.

WRITER

(Frankly disappointed)

Well, well.

WOMAN

Not so very unusual. I'm sorry. (*With a curl of the lips:*) I appreciate that it's scarcely drama, but it is a fact. She died, simply died, became ill and died, the way people do every day. I never met her, there was no scandal, no gossip even. She died. I was introduced to his people, his set. We were married. I tried to live up to his standards; I say "up" for I was supposed to have risen with my marriage. We both settled down to the security of it. He, sure of me, dead sure. Well, he was right. I have a great deal of pride and a strong sense of duty. I settled down to be like every woman I saw, every woman in our set, his set more than mine, commonplace, deadly respectable, prudent, serene, unimaginative, virtuous, never over-enthusiastic, never desperately disgusted. Oh, there was a time when I used to be both in the same minute! Honest! But I had outgrown my past, I actually liked that humdrum, middle class set and I thought he did. I should have known better—I who had once been the other woman! Such an advantage for a wife! And I neglected it. He found Paradise monotonous, missed his little serpent. And now I am

the wife, the stay at home, not so young as she once was, deceived wife. Only I'm not deceived.

WRITER

What kind of a woman is she?

WOMAN

She's younger than I am. She lives alone, she has no domestic worries, I mean servants, food, and things like that. She's on a higher plane. She's very careful of her background though. It's very lovely, made up of becoming colours; open fire, pink lights and all that sort of thing. And she dotes on his stories, the very oldest of them isn't too old for her! Then she's very dependent, appealing, very much in need of protection. He loves her for the dangers she is passing through! And when you consider they're for him, all for him! Oh, they've been through a great deal together, confronted by the same menace — me!

WRITER

(Really interested)

So you've met her, talked to her?

WOMAN

No, no. I haven't an idea who she is.

WRITER

But I thought you said —

WOMAN

(Almost impatiently)

Oh, they're all alike in essentials. I know she exists; the rest follows. *(After a slight pause she resumes reflectively.)* Of course I could find her somehow, entreat her to give him up, win her sympathy, and return home. You remember that scene of Leonard Merrick's in the "Bishop's Comedy"? Adorable, isn't it! But that isn't for all wives. It takes a certain kind of woman and a certain kind of man. Or I might die. But a husband doesn't have that kind of luck twice. Do you begin to see why I want your help?

WRITER

(Almost reproachfully)

Well, it's not exactly a new plot, is it? It's always interesting, of course.

WOMAN

Give it time — it may take a new turn.

(He looks at her doubtfully. Just then there is a knock at the door. His look changes to one of consternation.)

WOMAN

(Quickly; completely mistress of the situation)

I'll go back and make some more tea.

(She disappears into the kitchen. The

WRITER *opens the door and the CALLER enters.*)

CALLER

I beg your pardon, but did I — er — drop my glove here? I hope I'm not interrupting — your work.

WRITER

Why, I was just trying — your glove? No, I haven't seen it. What colour was it? (*The*

CALLER dangles a tan-coloured glove in his face.) Oh, I see — no —

CALLER

I — your servant couldn't have carried it out?

WRITER

I have no servant; no one here at night.

CALLER

Yes, to be sure. I remember you said so. Perhaps in the other room — you might have carried it in there.

WRITER

No. I haven't been out of this room.

CALLER

I must have been mistaken.

WRITER

Yes. I fear so. If it should turn up — but I'm sure it isn't here. (*There is a loud clash from the kitchen. An awkward pause follows.*) The partitions are so thin, one can hear every sound. A maid may have come in.

CALLER

I should think it would disturb you,— I mean the thin partitions, the noise.

WRITER

(*He doesn't actually say, "Must you go?" But he looks it*)

One gets accustomed to anything. Sorry about the glove. Hope you'll find it.

CALLER

Oh, it doesn't matter — just thought perhaps — Pardon the intrusion. Good-night!

(*He exits. The WRITER quickly closes the door. The WOMAN re-enters.*)

WRITER

What in thunder did you do that for?

WOMAN

What?

WRITER

That clatter out there!

STRANGERS

WOMAN

I didn't break anything.

WRITER

Oh, that's not it! Here I am, wasting my time, getting out of the writing mood, disturbed — annoyed — (*The WOMAN crosses to the window and raises the blind.*) What the devil! Come away from that window!

WOMAN

Why?

WRITER

Because — come away I say!

(He goes toward her, intent upon getting between her and the window. Suddenly, without warning and without provocation, she puts her hand on his arm.)

WRITER

(Indignantly)

What are you doing? Why — you mustn't!
(She comes away from the window, smiling as though completely satisfied.)

WOMAN

That's all! He has seen!

WRITER

Who? What?

WOMAN

My husband. I promised you something new. That man, your visitor, was my husband. I'm just a wife trying a new stunt. You see I followed you both into the house. I waited, hidden in the hall, for him to go out. He saw me, I made sure of that. I had on a heavy veil, but my figure was familiar. He couldn't believe his eyes. I tried to appear as at home in the house as I could, I walked quickly as though I knew where I was going. Luckily this door was open. I came in as though I had been here before. He waited outside in — oh, I hope it was what one might call an agony of impatience! Then he came back. You and I did the rest. He thinks — he thinks —

WRITER

Good God!

WOMAN

I'm very grateful to you. But after all you've something to thank me for. I've given you a plot; you know you hadn't a story in your head!

WRITER

(Succumbing for the moment to the interest of the occasion)

But what's the end? How does it end?

WOMAN

That's your business. That's what I came here to get from you.

WRITER

(Uncomfortably)

But I shall have to tell him —

WOMAN

Never! You wouldn't do that! Oh, you wouldn't!

WRITER

But he'll think — why, that I —

WOMAN

What's the difference what he thinks? He wouldn't believe you anyway. You see you did deny my being here, you did help me to hide.

WRITER

(Sullenly)

You hid yourself.

WOMAN

Why, he knows me so well that he would never in the world believe that I would come here in spite of you. I want him back, not because I'm madly in love with him, but because I should be such a miserable failure if I couldn't keep him, and with my advantages too — the halo of having once been *that* woman, the other one! You see

this will show him, that I still have undiscovered depths not dreamed of by him, though we live in the same house. As for you, it isn't your life. You're only an acquaintance. He'll shun you perhaps. What of it? I'm the one that counts. He'll find he owns something someone else covets. I'll be worth guarding. Either that or — you're thinking he may divorce me. Well, that's better than the other, than failure to keep him, just dull humdrum, middle class failure. Only it's going to be tiresome keeping it up, for you I mean. I'll have to come here occasionally for a time.

WRITER

I shall move away!

WOMAN

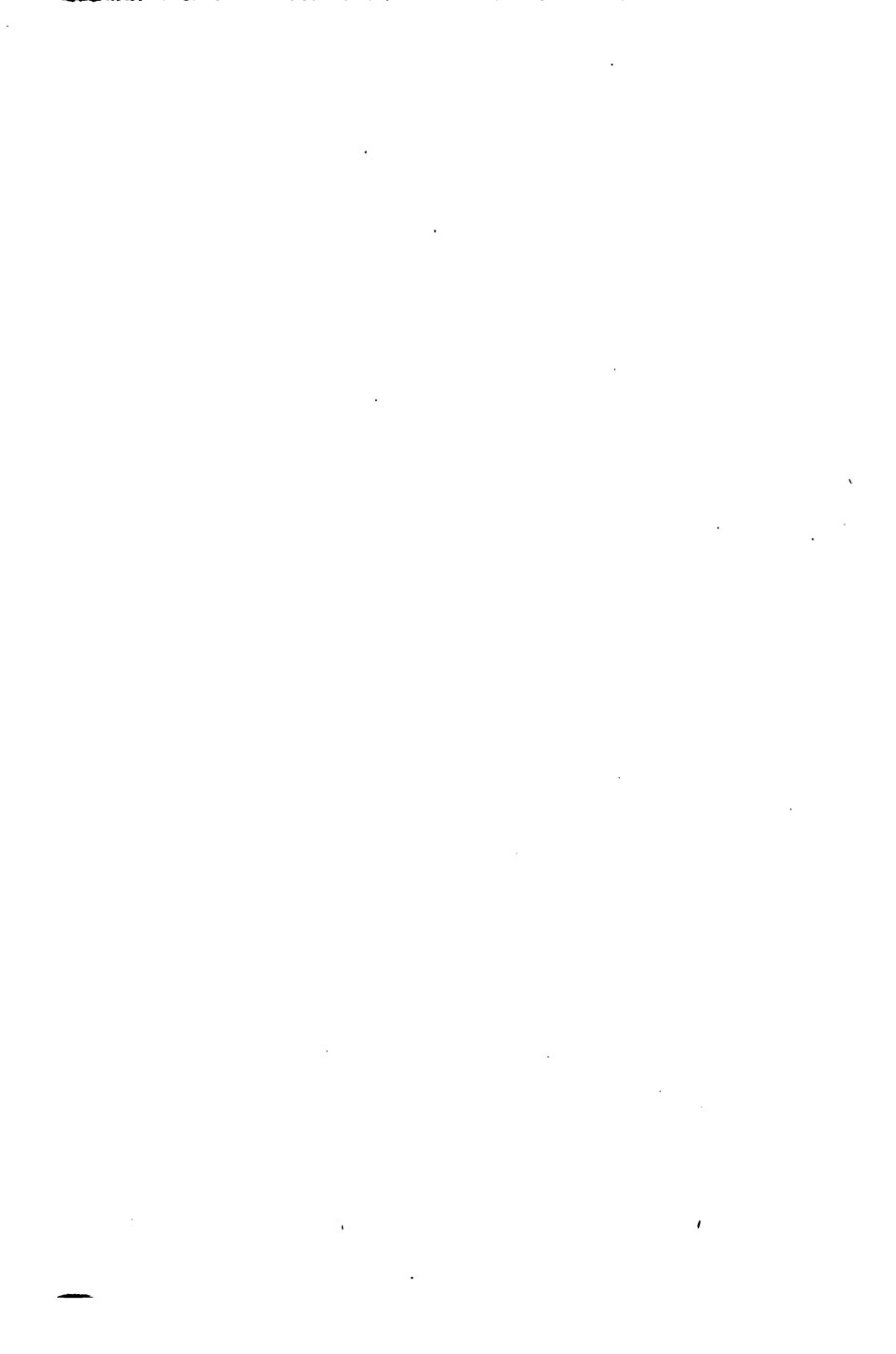
(With genuine enthusiasm)

Oh, if you would! If you'd go away, break it off, because I—I—leave the rest to me! Good-night! My husband is waiting outside.

WRITER

I wonder if he is! *(The WOMAN disappears quickly. He goes to the window and stands straining to see.)* By Jove!

(He starts forward eagerly and we leave him looking out into the darkness as the curtain falls.)



MAKING A MAN

CHARACTERS

GUY PARKER

DR. FELDER

MRS. GUY PARKER

MAGGIE

MAKING A MAN

A ROOM in the home of GUY PARKER, an artist with pictures to sell. He is over eighteen and under forty-five. He can't conscientiously swear that he is the sole support of his little family, a wife and boy, because he isn't. They could not live even on the wrong side of Washington Square, if MRS. PARKER's father hadn't happened to be rich enough to leave her an income. In normal times no husband would complain of such forethought, but when this play opens it happens to be October of the year 1918, when examining and exemption boards were working overtime.

The room, a sort of literary den, is comfortable enough, but the owner of it, GUY PARKER, is visibly disturbed, uncomfortable, shivery, pale or yellow as the case may be. He comes in furtively, glad to find the place empty, and yet irritated that no one is there to welcome him. It is plain that things are all wrong with him. Alone, he doesn't hesitate to confess it. He crosses over to the mirror, looks at himself in disgust and is even heard to mutter a contemptuous "bah." One

feels as though he would like to obliterate his reflection, yet he is not bad-looking. On the contrary if he didn't look ill — but he is ill and no mistake. He sinks into a chair but he can't rest. Scarcely is he down, when he is up again. He crosses to a side table and pours himself out a glass of brandy, swallows it at a gulp, buries his face in his hands, and then looks up startled, as some one enters. It is only the maid of all work, MAGGIE, who has come in to look for WILLIE'S flag.

MAGGIE

Willie wants his flag, sir.

PARKER

Flag — flag — (*The word annoys PARKER beyond understanding. He jumps to his feet.*) What the devil is the flag doing in here? (*It is the Stars and Stripes, and he finds he has been sitting on it. He drops it as though it burnt his fingers. Then, rather ashamed of himself, he quiets down muttering.*) This isn't the place for it. The nursery is the place; toys everywhere! Where in thunder is everybody anyway? The place is like a tomb. (*He shivers, throws open the window and lets in the sound of an organ grinding out "The Star Spangled Banner."* He bangs the window down, cursing the noise under his breath.) Where is Mrs. Parker?

MAGGIE

The ladies do be playing cards in the parlour. My, but you look sick, sir. Anything I can do?

PARKER

Sick? I should say so. (*Grunts almost as though she were responsible.*) I've sent for the doctor, Doctor Felder. When he comes show him right in here.

MAGGIE

(*Hesitating*)

Shall I tell Mrs. Parker?

PARKER

No; no; I don't want to see anyone. (*Irritably after a pause.*) How many are there in there?

MAGGIE

Oh, only four. There's Mrs. Beale and —

PARKER

(*Cutting her off short*)

I know — I know — I don't want them in here. Don't let them know I'm home. Where's Willie?

MAGGIE

He took sick sir; he's in there, in bed. (*Indicating a room beyond.*) And please, sir, he keeps asking if you're a soldier.

PARKER

(Sharply)

What?

MAGGIE

A dozen times this day he has said: "My father's going to be a soldier!" If you'd see him, sir, and tell him —

PARKER

(With growing irritability)

No; no: I'm sick; I can't see him.

MAGGIE

Well, I won't tell him you're in yet; he doesn't know.

PARKER

(Trying to pull himself together)

What's the matter with him?

MAGGIE

It's his stomick, sir.

PARKER

Something he's eaten! He's always eating something! Can't anyone look after that child?

MAGGIE

He's better now, sir; much quieter.

(PARKER grunts. All through this there has been a noise upstairs as of children

running, growing louder and louder. The apartment is a humble one and the sounds from everywhere trickle through as surely as the doors creak and the windows stick. Suddenly there is a scream, the noise of an opening door, and a rush through the hall.)

PARKER

(Losing control again)

What's that?

MAGGIE

The children upstairs! *(The sound of "Yankee Doodle" and the children marching to it floats through the room, and then a band is heard in the street.)* It's the army! If Willie hears them he'll be out of bed in a minute!

(With that, MAGGIE, much excited, dashes out as she came in, flag in hand. PARKER closes the door and even draws a curtain, trying to shut out the noise. Then he sinks into a chair, grabs up a couple of cushions and covers his ears with them. Upon this scene, DR. FELDER is shown. He is German, of course, a German-American. He is pompous and important, but the German part of him is only faintly indicated or PARKER might have had nothing to do with him.)

FELDER

Well, I got your message. You feel not so good, eh? Well, that was to be expected. (*He takes off his coat and lays down his hat.*) Such a difficulty to get here! Twenty soldiers passed by; twenty! And the streets are blocked; everyone stands to cheer them! Disgusting! The city should see to it that the comfort of its people is not interfered with. I have been pushed and mauled. Is the soldier such an extraordinary sight? Twenty soldiers and twenty raw recruits, and everyone stops to look! You should see them — poor devils, each with a bundle; cannon food for Germany, bah!

(*Throughout this PARKER shrinks nervously, completely broken down, ashamed, sullen.*)

PARKER

Don't be so sure — America is going to win this war!

FELDER

Well, we can't tell; perhaps! I live in America. I practise here. I get my living here. Naturally, I hope — but I only say we can't tell. (*He says this with unction while every word cuts like a lash.*) Meanwhile I help you to stay home, out of it all; out of all that wretchedness and filth.

PARKER

Well you needn't rub it in.

FELDER

Why not? Why not? You got a wife and child; not so? Why should you go? No, it's not fair, I say, to ask a man to give up his work to go out and get shot because — just because a few Americans want war.

PARKER

(Utterly wretched)

A few? All — all! Banners — flags — khaki everywhere.

FELDER

No; not so! I can give you names of doctors working like me to save men from the draft; men willing to be saved. There is Dr. Bayer, Dr. Schultz; oh, there are many!

PARKER

Really? Ready to help wretches like me?

FELDER

Now, now, now. A man has as much duty to stay home as to go. That's what I tell them all. Out there — what? Not one in fifty comes back. Oh, the German knows how to shoot!

PARKER

(Ugly)

So does the American! He's proving it.

FELDER

Well I didn't say he wasn't. I said the German was a good shot; that's all. When he has finished with Europe —

PARKER

(Interrupting with temper)

There you go again!

FELDER

Well, when Europe has finished with him. It's all the same. My, but you pick me up! When does your examination begin?

PARKER

(Disconsolately)

I've been today.

FELDER

So! They reject you, hein? What did I promise, hein? *(The doctor walks up and down the room chuckling.)* You see, American doctors haven't had our education; over here they don't know everything. If only I could spread the knowledge of what that little drug I gave you will accomplish, you would see some very startling

things. By it the heart is affected, quickly, materially. Oh, do not be afraid. I shall have you all right in a couple of days. What did they ask you — the doctors? Eh?

PARKER

It was very simple. I filled out my papers some time ago. They examined my heart the first thing; asked me how long I had been aware I had heart trouble; asked me if I had taken anything —

FELDER

(Quickly)

Of course you said not.

PARKER

(Bitterly)

Of course. There was a big American flag hanging in front of my eyes. I looked at it, and lied. They asked about my family, my life. I told them I had always had heart trouble. I said what you told me to — God, how I despised myself! They told me to report again Friday. A fellow came out as I went in. He said they had rejected him on account of his teeth; five missing —

FELDER

(Calmly)

Yes, yes. The dentist can accomplish a great

deal but so few dentists are doing it. Some surgeons have done well, but that takes courage. A finger must be sacrificed; or the hearing, or the eyes tampered with. My way is best.

PARKER

(With unutterable loathing)

For cowards like me! Cowards all of us — cowards!

FELDER

(With a judicial air)

I deny that these men are cowards. They have conscientious scruples and rightly. There are not so many as one would expect. We have been surprised how few, but if men like you who have been successful would go out and tell the others. If you would whisper to this one or that what can be done for such a trifling cost; without of course mentioning my name; and you can assure them that it is safe, perfectly safe. What I want is to build up, to spread this knowledge. It is a kindness. The more men you keep from the army, the sooner this war ends.

PARKER

(Fiercely)

Ends? But what way — ends?

FELDER

(*Soothingly*)

Well, well, it ends. What is the difference how? We have prosperity again; and life. You sell your works. Your stocks are up again. And what I propose is absolutely safe. American doctors, I mean, you know, doctors who haven't had the advantage of education at some German clinic — (*Breaking off suddenly in his enthusiasm.*) I ask you are there any greater doctors in the world than those of Germany? No, no. American doctors have doubtless never even heard of those little drops in that bottle I gave you to make you safe, to keep you out of the draft. Now I want you to take something to set you up again where you were before America became war mad.

PARKER

(*Sullenly*)

They gave me something over there.

FELDER

(*Disturbed*)

So?

PARKER

They told me to take it and come back.

FELDER

Let me see it. (PARKER *hands him a small*

phial. The doctor holds it to the light, smells it, tastes it and mutters uneasily.) The antidote! (*Anxiously.*) When are you to go back?

PARKER

Tomorrow.

FELDER

They suspect something! Strange how Americans are always suspicious!

(At this moment MAGGIE appears at the door in great excitement.)

MAGGIE

Excuse me, sir, but Willie looks awful bad! He doesn't answer me when I speak to him.

PARKER

Willie?

MAGGIE

I wish you'd come in; he's never been this way.

PARKER

(Calmly, thinking of course the maid exaggerates)

Excuse me a minute, doctor. *(He follows MAGGIE out of the room. In his absence, which lasts just a second, FELDER puts on his coat and picks up his hat. PARKER returns, frightened, holding the door open behind him.)* I can't rouse him! For God's sake have a look at him! He's all we have! This way, Doctor.

(FELDER *rips off his coat and disappears with PARKER who now hovers between what appears to be the bedroom and the den. MRS. PARKER, whom MAGGIE has summoned, enters hurriedly, leaving the lower door open, so that sounds of jollity are heard from the card players behind it.*)

MRS. PARKER

What is it?

PARKER

Billy! He doesn't answer me. I can't make it out!

MRS. PARKER

He's been complaining all day. Something disagreed with him.

PARKER

The doctor happened to be here, Dr. Felder. He's gone in.

MRS. PARKER

What did he say?

PARKER

He hasn't come out yet; I don't know.

MRS. PARKER

(*Afraid now to go in*)

Do you hear anything?

PARKER

No.

MRS. PARKER

Where's Maggie?

PARKER

In there; in there with the doctor.

(There is a burst of merriment from the bridge party, at its height when MAGGIE comes back into the room crying.)

MRS. PARKER

(In terror)

What is it? For God's sake!

(MRS. PARKER rushes out past her as FELDER returns. He looks at PARKER; shrugs his shoulders and moves towards his coat as though he'd like to be off.)

PARKER

(Apparently dazed)

Doctor?

FELDER

Nothing. I can do; nothing. Too late — the heart. Perhaps if I had been called in earlier —

PARKER

You don't mean?

(MRS. PARKER is heard sobbing outside before she enters.)

MRS. PARKER

Doctor — doctor — can't you do anything?
What does it mean?

PARKER

The doctor says his heart —

MRS. PARKER

(Trying to control her voice)

He complained of his stomach — I gave him something for indigestion. Oh, where is that stuff? Maggie — the bottle — (*Appealing to doctor.*) Oh, can't you do anything?

MAGGIE

(Between her sobs)

Here's the medicine! . It was out of this bottle.
(FELDER takes it.)

MRS. PARKER

My husband's medicine for indigestion. Billy
— Billy —

(With a prolonged wail MRS. PARKER dashes out of the room followed by MAGGIE. DR. FELDER and PARKER are left facing each other. The card players are heard again laughing loudly.)

MAKING A MAN

DR. FELDER *bangs the door sharply upon them. Then it is seen that he is beside himself with terror. Holding up the bottle in one trembling hand he turns upon PARKER.*)

FELDER

Man — man — you verdamter idiot you!
You leave this about! You — you've killed your
child!

PARKER

*(Also beside himself, but now as much with rage
as with grief.)*

I? I? You damned old German scoundrel!
You dare! You — you —

FELDER

Calm now, calm —

PARKER

You accuse me? You?

FELDER

(In great agitation)

We must get rid of this bottle.

PARKER

Oh, that's your game, is it?

FELDER

Well, isn't it yours? Don't be a fool!

(Grabs up his coat again.)

PARKER

You think you're going to get away?

(Stands in front of door.)

FELDER

If I don't get away, what's going to become of you, eh? Come to your senses, man! Let me out! Are you mad? It's easy enough to fool the coroner. Let me out.

PARKER

(With bitter scorn)

So that you can help other cowards like me.

FELDER

(Beginning to cringe)

I tell you I'll put you back in shape if only you give me time.

PARKER

(With sudden fierce resolution)

Time? Time! That's what you're going to get! You've killed my boy!

FELDER

Good God, you'll have the neighbours in here in a minute.

PARKER

(Quietly)

Yes and the police. It's the finger of God, Felder!

FELDER

Tomorrow you'll curse yourself!

PARKER

Today we're going to face the music, Felder.

(The desperate calm of PARKER frightens the doctor more and more.)

FELDER

(In a hoarse whisper)

Look, if you keep your mouth shut, I'll save you. Germany is back of this. For every man I keep out of the draft I get money, big money. I'll divide with you. I'll give you half. You won't have to do anything but sit still and wait. I'll send your name to Wilhelmstrasse and when the war is over you'll be rich — rich — rich! You'll be decorated. You've only got to keep your mouth shut.

PARKER

Good God! You offer me Germany's blood money in exchange for my boy!

FELDER

Be a man! I'll give you three quarters — all — all! Be a man!

PARKER

With God's help I mean to be. (*He grabs up the telephone and calls at the top of his lungs.*) Help! Help! Police! Help! A German has killed my child! A German! A German! Send a policeman! Be quick! (*At this MRS. PARKER and MAGGIE rush in. Doors are flung open and frightened faces appear. PARKER has forced FELDER into a chair where he crouches writhing. PARKER towers above him.*) Listen, all of you. I wanted to cheat my country at this time, in its need, in its peril. God forgive me. I fell into the hands of this cur; this carrion in the pay of Germany. His poison, made in Germany, was for cowards like me. It was to create an army of slackers. By a turn of fate it has killed my boy, my boy lying dead in there. I know now what we are fighting for! I know now what freedom means! I know now that there is something dearer to me than my body, my wretched body. (*Through the room there are murmurs of "Oh, the pity of it." "His child!" "Horrible!"*) Listen. For months I could see myself in the trenches, maimed, smashed, writhing in agony. I lost sight of the great thing, the great cause, my

country's need, my country's peril; the murdered women and children, the devastated cities. I saw only the infinitesimal me. It took that, my boy in there, killed by a German, to bring before me the mothers and children of Belgium.

(Suddenly there is a commotion outside, and voices are heard crying, "It's the police! Let them in! Open the doors." The groans of the doctor and the sobs of the women are almost drowned in the confusion as the curtain falls.)

THE END